

Retiring pastor views parish as diocesan 'garden'

Parish Profile

St. Joseph's,
Rush



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

RUSH — Turn down the main thoroughfare of this quaint country town and you will soon see a charming little church that is a gem of a parish, the garden spot of the diocese, and has a choir that is second to none.

Of course, such a description springs to mind because the church's pastor, Father Richard C. O'Connell, makes sure anyone within earshot hears him describe St. Joseph's as just that.

"This is the best parish of the diocese," he asserted.

Realizing that some of the other parishes he has served might resent such a statement, he quickly qualified the assertion. Modifying his original, flowery description, Father O'Connell then offered an entirely levelheaded appraisal of his parish.

"The people here are just so great to work with — and ready to listen to you as long as you do it our way," he joked.

It's St. Joseph's small-town atmosphere that makes its members feel at home, according to Judy Clark, pastoral minister and coordinator of the Rite of Christian



S. John Willdnr/Staff photographer
Father Richard C. O'Connell joins hands with Deacon Eugene Edwards June 25 while celebrating his final Mass as pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Rush.

Initiation of Adults.

"I like the closeness," she said. "There's names to people and not just numbers."

Indeed, Theresa Aroune, a member of the parish's small Christian Bible-study community, credited the group of eight parishioners with encouraging her spiritual and intellectual aspects to bloom.

"I'm sort of very shy and afraid of speaking out, but through this I have become so open with my feelings," she said of the study group.

The small community has enabled her to discover God's love through its use of discussions, readings and videos about Scripture, Aroune explained.

She added that she gains even more insight and peace by studying God's word in the parish's Perpetual Adoration Chapel, which was established five years ago at Father O'Connell's urging.

"I think the serenity of the chapel puts you in that frame of mind," she said.

Apparently, the chapel has become a popular meditative spot in the parish; approximately 120 people have volunteered for at least one hour of Eucharistic adoration per month, Clark said.

Father O'Connell noted that he established the chapel: "To reaffirm Catholic belief in the real presence, and to offer people quiet time for prayer."

But parishioners don't simply look to their own needs for meditation and



Father O'Connell, who will be residing at Rochester's St. Monica's Parish of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, gives Brenna Cammeron a farewell hug.

prayer when "living out their faith," the pastor explained. In fact, St. Joseph's evidences a lively social-action ethos, boasting an active pro-life committee and a Legion of Mary whose members regularly

visit the sick.

In fact, St. Joseph's regularly reaches out to fellow Catholics and Catholic groups struggling with the challenges of urban life.

Mount Carmel Parish in inner-city Rochester, for example, has received 10 percent of St. Joseph's weekly collection since 1984.

Both parishes have shared liturgies in the past, the pastor said, and Clark described the relationship between country church and city parish as mutually beneficial.

"I think it helps to move us beyond parochialism," she said.

The parish also regularly gives food and clothing to the House of Mercy, a neighborhood outreach center operated in Rochester by the Sisters of Mercy.

And St. Joseph's parishioners work diligently to raise funds for such Catholic relief efforts as Operation Rice Bowl, the U.S. bishops' Lenten fundraising drive on behalf of international and local anti-hunger programs.

At the same time the parish reaches out to others, its members are keenly aware of their own needs.

Father O'Connell called St. Joseph's a family oriented parish and pointed out that 100 children are enrolled in its catechetical programs. He added that the church holds a chicken barbecue the Saturday after Labor Day each year to raise funds for Catholic-school scholarships for the parish's 30 children enrolled in diocesan schools.

Staff members noted that it might take too long to list all of the suppers, dinners, brunches and other social activities offered by the parish.

But Arlene Bock, parish secretary/bookkeeper and mother of church organist Pam Ebersold, delivered a succinct comment that echoed the sentiments behind Father O'Connell's gushing description of the parish.

"St. Joseph's is my life," she exclaimed.

SNAPSHOTS

St. Joseph's Church, 6105 Rush

Lima Road, Rush

Phone: 716/533-1719

Established: 1864

Families: About 400

Ministerial Staff:

Pastor:

Father Richard C. O'Connell

Parish Secretary/Bookkeeper:

Arlene Bock

Director of Religious Education:

Ann Kubiak

Youth Minister: Keith Bock

Pastoral Associate/RCIA Coordinator:

Judy Clark

Parish Council Facilitator:

Phil Wagner

Organist: Pamela Ebersold

Choir Director: John O'Mara

Folk Group Leader:

Chris Matyjakowski

Custodian: John Sand



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